DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 181 PS 014 710

AUTHOR Resch, Paula C.
TITLE Suzuki and the Teaching of Writing: A Surprising Connection.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Early Childhood Education; Group Instruction; *Humanistic Education; *Music Education; Parent Role; Teacher Role; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; Young Children
IDENTIFIERS *Suzuki Method

ABSTRACT

Process writing and Suzuki's Mother Tongue Method of music instruction are similar in many ways. Like Suzuki teachers, teachers of writing who use the process method are humanizing children in a technological age. Both Suzuki and leaders of the writing renaissance believe that every child can be a musician or a writer. Both methods tell learners that they can do "the real thing" and do it very well. In both writing classrooms and in Suzuki repertoire classes, students learn from one another. As students are freed from the isolation traditionally associated with mastering a skill, the teacher also assumes a new role: that of fellow participant. In both methods, fundamentals are learned but do not occupy a central place in instruction. Finally, in both Suzuki music instruction and the new writing movement, the parent is involved in the process. Suzuki is famous for the extent to which he expects parents to participate. Today, teachers of writing are asking for a similar kind of participation from parents. Most of all, these teachers want parents to welcome what comes home stamped "Writing in Progress" and to see it as just that, even if it looks irregular, incomplete, and unformed. (RH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED251181

Suzuki and the Teaching of Writing: A Surprising Connection

by

Paula C. Resch

Assistant Professor

English Department

Loras College

Dubuque, Iowa 52001

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Paula C. Resch

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PS 014710

NOTE: Because I do not want identifying information in the text, I include here the necessary citation for my daughter's "All About Turtles:" Elise Resch, age 6, Lincoln School, Dubuque, Iowa.

Suzuki and the Teaching of Writing: A Surprising Connection

"All About Turtles"
turtles have a hardshels
turtles wook slolee
I like turtles
turtles are a cide of anamole
Some Liv in the wutr
and Some Liv on Land
turtles are nice!

What does this piece of my six-year-old daughter's writing have in common with the scratchy sounds that come frequently from her miniature violin? Some would say the answer is simple: they are both results of her meager attempts to write or to make music; she may one day master the skills, but that day seems a long way in the future. However, I suggest that these "works in progress" hold much more immediate value. They are results of two methods of teaching--one which I use which I will call process-writing and the other is Suzuki's Mother Tongue Method of music instruction.

What I want to show is that these two methods have a lot in common and teachers of writing should recognize that if they use the process method they are not working in an educational vacuum, but, like Suzuki teachers, they are making important strides in humanizing young people in a technological age.

A Skill Open to All

I will begin with the least concrete but perhaps most important connection between process-writing and the Suzuki method. Both Suzuki and leaders of the writing renaissance (a term many prefer for the movement) believe that every child can be a musician or a writer. Suzuki writes, "Our principle is based on the premise that talent is not inborn but that every child acquires ability through experience and repetition." (Suzuki 27) Often in the past, writing has been defined so narrowly for children that they have not been able to succeed. But if we give children many different invitations to write and especially ones drawing on their own experience, they can all succeed since as Janet Emig has said, "there is so marvelous a democracy in the distribution of feeling and of imagination." (Emig 100) Both the writing renaissance advocates and Suzuki inspire us to approach young learners with the attitude that these are not elusive skills that only a few can master, but rather that all children can write and make music.

A Special Kind of Achievement

Consider how we treat beginners with these new methods. Suzuki begins with the "Twinkle Variations"--eight lines in just the first variation. I contrast that with the first song I learned at the piano. The words were "Off we go to music land, training ear and eye and hand." (Thompson 4) This piece had only fourteen notes in the right hand, one corresponding to each syllable. It sounds like a first song and it made one remember he/she was a beginner. Similarly, the process-writing proponents encourage whole stories, essays, or projects rather than beginning with sentences, moving to paragraphs and then on to the whole piece. Both methods, it seems to me, are telling the learner, "you can do the real thing."

Not only can the student do the "real thing," he or she is encouraged to do it very well. Suzuki is quoted as saying:

> I tell a student, after he has learned to play a piece, 'Now that your preparation is complete let's practice in order to build your ability.'... Some mothers think that going to the next piece means becoming more advanced. But the key point of Suzuki education is to

> foster fine ability, and this is created with an old, familiar piece that the student can already play. (McSpadden 2)

Similarly, the new writing teachers encourage multiple drafts of the writing project, so that the student can enter more into the writing process as professionals practice it. We don't expect them to stay with a project seven years like Mark Twain did with Huckleberry Finn, but we do encourage students to do the kind of fine tuning that engages them in the processes of adding, deleting, substituting and rearranging that are central to authentic writing. Characteristically, a student being taught by the new method may only complete half as many projects as the student being taught traditionally, but like Suzuki, these teachers want us to look at advancement in the subject in a new way.

The Group Experience

In up-to-date writing classrooms a workshop atmosphere prevails that is not too different from a Suzuki repertoire class; in both environments, students learn from each other. Today children no longer write alone and turn in a finished

product to an instructor who only lets other students see the work if she can assure the author's anonymity. Rather students show drafts of their work to their peers and learn from them, often giving lively comments to their classmates in the process. Workshops and repertoire classes lead to finished products and concerts, but the difference today is students get to those end points working at least somewhat as a group. We are helping them break out of the isolation traditionally associated with mastering a skill.

The Teacher's Role

It is not only the student's peers' role that has changed in all of this. The teacher also assumes a new role--that of fellow participant. When I was growing up, my piano teacher would play a piece only to demonstrate how it was to be played. My children, however, play often with their Suzuki teachers. This playing together is instructional, of course but most of all teacher and student are making music together. As a parent, I enjoy listening to them and as a college teacher espousing similar methods to what my children are learning by, I "expose" myself as often as I can find the nerve. I let my students watch me try the projects that I suggest for them. They see me hunting for the right word and experimenting with possibilities, and sometimes in these

unrehearsed sessions, I write myself into a corner. That's when I envy the Suzuki teacher to whom this doesn't seem to happen. She knows what songs she is going to play with the students and is usually not trying to demonstrate how the mind works in composition. Still the basic premise of teacher as participant holds, and we can't deny its value in stimulating a student's interest and in building a healthier relationship between student and teacher. Like the workshops and repertoire classes, this teacher participation makes the experience more social and more humanizing.

The Question of Fundamentals

I expect even the most traditional music teacher could assent to the value of a child's listening to tapes. This practice is integral to Suzuki's Mother Tongue method because he feels children can learn music the way they learn their native language, that is, through extensive listening. In the case of writing, the traditionalist may keep from wincing and appreciate the turtle piece at the beginning of this article. However, the controversy arises when we consider the place of drill and practice. Shouldn't our children be spending some of that listening time on scales and chords and reading music? Shouldn't free writing time

be spent more on spelling, capitalization and punctuation? In both the modern methods I've been discussing, there still is a time for learning these fundamentals, but they are not nearly so central as we once thought. What we have found, I believe, is that knowing what something is called is not a prerequisite for using it. Surely it adds to our understanding of language or music to know these principles, but they did not deserve the concentrated focus they once enjoyed. As the National Council of Teachers of English recommends, "Watch out for 'the grammar trap.' . . . Some knowledge of grammar is useful, but too much time spent on study of grammar steals time from the study of writing." (NCTE) I imagine Suzuki would see something right in those words.

The Parent's Part

Too much has been said so far about the student and the teacher to the neglect of the parent. In both Suzuki and the new writing movement the parent is pulled into the process. Suzuki is famous for the extent to which he expects parents to participate. How different from my childhood when parents turned a deaf ear to the practice but applauded embarassingly long at the recitals. Writing teachers today are asking a

similar kind of participation from parents. They are begging parents to read to children, to take dictation from their children when they're too young to write but not too young to tell stories, and to use the resources available to do the copying and the collating necessary to "publish" the child's work. Perhaps most of all, they want parents to welcome what comes home stamped "Writing in Progress" and to see it as just that, even if it looks like "All About Turtles" quoted above.

In Conclusion

Many of us like to think we are living in a new age, educationally speaking. I know I've watched my children who've learned by the Mother Tongue method of Suzuki approach music with a naturalness my generation lacked. Likewise, my writing students tell me I've taught them to get involved in the writing process like they never have before.

At a time when four recent studies of education call for excellence, but excellence in terms of children becoming more effective cogs in a technological economy, (Hacker 35) Suzuki and the leaders of the writing renaissance, offer an alternative kind of excellence, that is, one based on humanizing through two ancient mediums: music and writing.

REFERENCES

Emig, Janet. The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1971.

Hacker, Andrew. "The Schools Flunk Out." The New York Review of Books, 12 April 1984, 35-40.

McSpadden, Joseph. "Law of Ability or Flaw in Ability." Suzuki World 2(November-December 1983): 2-3 and 28-30.

National Council of Teachers of English. How to Help Your Child Become a Better Writer. n.d. (Pamphlet.)

Suzuki, Shinichi. Nurtured by Love: A New Approach to Education. Translated by Waltraud Suzuki. New York: Exposition Press, 1969.

Thompson, John. John Thompson's Modern Course for the Piano. Cincinnati: The Willis Music Co, 1936.